



FAR-AWAY FOLKS



Schools and Sharks in Porto Rico

By DAVID S. GREENBERG

WHAT a day it was! Over the white soft sand and the cocoanut grove hung the clearest of blue Porto Rican skies. Even the trade winds were too lazy to blow. 'Way out at sea the pink-purple island of Vieques just rose above the blue water and smiled. The ocean waves, which at other times roared and beat the sandy shore, now laughed lazily, rippled up the white sand a few inches and fell back with a sound that said "Too sweet a day to work or fight."

And Eduardo had to go to school! It was unthinkable! He had to climb a high hill and descend into a scrubby valley. Then he would have to sit in a small schoolhouse full of youngsters and bother his head about letters and figures—and the awful English ones at that. But that wasn't all! Worse than everything else, Eduardo had to dress up. Until Eduardo was ten years old all the clothes he ever wore was his own brown skin. Then, because grownup people had foolish ideas, he compromised. He put on a small but roomy pair of trousers and hung them up on his shoulder by one-half of an old pair of his father's suspenders. When this suspender began

commented Eduardo in disgust. The sea, the stones, even the shark were all his. He loved them and they all loved him. "He'd like to eat me just as much when I climb the slanting cocoanut tree to bring you down the green cocoanuts. I know he would!"

But the idea bothered him. Could it really be, he thought, that that black shark wanted him to go to school? Of course he didn't believe it. At any rate, he decided to find out. Eduardo was no coward and he was quite sure his mother was only fooling him.

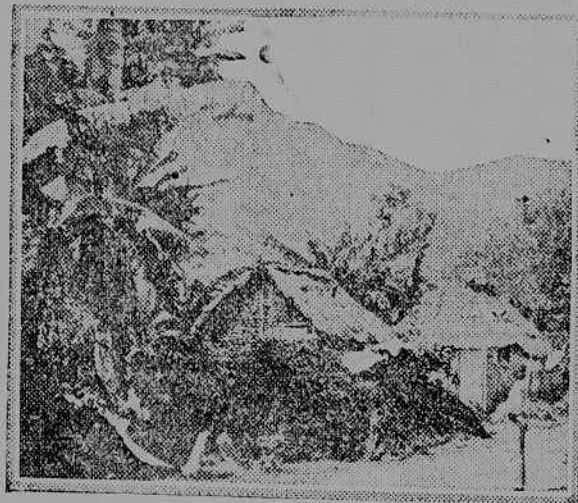
So when Mother Lopez was busy cooking rice and beans, Eduardo just sneaked off to the beach and there he ran for all he was worth, never stopping till he came to a big rocky bluff at the end of the beach. There was an opening in this rock which led to another little beach on the other side, and as soon as Eduardo got there he felt safe. The moment his bare feet hit the warm rock on the other side hundreds of tiny crabs began to scatter in every direction. Eduardo chased them all away, laughing as he did so, then pulled off his one important garment and dived into the sea like a frog. He was so glad to see the water, to be safe from school, that he forgot about his shark. He swam and dived and floated, yelling for sheer joy. Then suddenly as he turned over he saw a black object in the distance coming straight over the water for him. With a shriek of terror Eduardo made for the rock, his small brown hands paddling as if they were run by electricity.

When he stood at last safe on the rock, he peered out over the water, his eyes staring out of his kinky little head. He saw nothing, but he was still shaking like a leaf. He decided he would not risk such a thing again. The shark had disappeared, but a shark that could insist on your going to school might be able to make himself invisible whenever he wanted to.

Eduardo ran back home as swiftly as he had come and not only put on a shirt, but a bright yellow tie as well, and from that day on Eduardo went to school.

Not far from San Juan is the Porto Rican University. Young men and women, eager to learn, come there for an education. In one of the most important classrooms sits Señor Don Eduardo Lopez, professor of science. On his desk, holding down important papers, so that the trade winds stealing in through the open window can't take them away, is a heavy metal shark. Often when the professor has been looking out of the window and the lovely Porto Rican day has made him dream of his boyhood he thinks:

"That was a lucky shark for me. I might be working in the sugar mills to-day if he hadn't converted me to schoolgoing."



Where Eduardo Might Have Lived

to annoy his right shoulder he switched it over to the left. But to be allowed in the schoolroom he had to add a shirt—such a ridiculously uncomfortable nuisance!

"If you don't go to school and learn," cried his mother this early morning, when all other arguments had failed, "the first time you go off alone to swim the black shark will come and swallow you."

"What does the shark care if I go to school or not?"